

INFORMATION

Suggested Program for Public Relations for the American College of Chest Physicians

[The following is a report submitted to the American College of Chest Physicians by its Committee on Public Relations under the chairmanship of William C. Voorsanger, M.D.]

Questions of public relations for any group are very important. We must differentiate public relations from propaganda and from publicity. Public relations should mean the carrying on of a program which wins support from our own members and from medical and lay people at large. How to achieve this purpose is difficult. As your committee sees it, it should be divided into five headings.

I. *Public Relations in Regard to Members of the College and Other Physicians Practicing the Specialty of Chest Diseases.*

The work of our governing body and those who actively participate in the programs of the college should be of such a high character that all Fellows and Associates will be justly proud of their organization. Mediocrity will at all times lead to poor public relations. At the present time, means of communication among members of the college is through our journal, *Diseases of the Chest*. This has improved greatly as the years have gone by, and through its constant improvement, it can be a source of instruction and guidance to all in the chest specialty. Our newly created American Medical Association Section on Diseases of the Chest, for which we have struggled so many years, should be always officered by the leading chest specialists of the country and the programs should be of an excellence which would justify the faith of the House of Delegates in creating this section.

II. *Public Relations in Regard to the General Practitioner.*

Your committee considers the duty of the chest specialist to the general practitioner as the most important in the realm of public relations. There is accumulating evidence that the general practitioner, who is usually the physician first to see a chest condition, either tuberculous or non-tuberculous, is totally ignorant of clinical methods of diagnosis as far as this disease is concerned. He depends almost exclusively upon a report of an x-ray laboratory. Experiences have shown that roentgenologists in their interpretations blunder as often as chest men. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to see that the general practitioners recognize chest pathology early. If there is any doubt, consultation should be sought. If the general practitioner, the roentgenologist and

the chest specialist would only cooperate instead of working independently, many errors of diagnosis could be avoided. Your committee feels that the greatest reason for the creating of a special section on chest diseases is the education of the general practitioner in early diagnosis of chest conditions. Our public relations should be directed towards inviting all general practitioners to attend our meeting of the Section of Chest Diseases at the American Medical Association. We should publicize this fact: We recognize specialists but we particularly want general practitioners. If possible, editorials should be written and okayed by this committee, not only for our own journal, but for the American Medical Association Journal and state journals, stressing the importance of this new Section on Diseases of the Chest, particularly as it pertains to the education of the general practitioner in this specialty.

III. *Public Relations in Regard to Medical Teaching Institutions.*

Your committee has been told that this properly comes under the committee on medical education. We believe, however, that public relations properly handled could pave the way for a committee which has charge of improving medical education on chest diseases in the teaching institutions. Literature could be sent to the heads of medical departments showing how important it is for the medical student and intern to learn more and more about diseases of the chest, particularly tuberculosis, before he starts practicing on his public.

IV. *Public Relations in Regard to the Public.*

Your committee feels that this is a very important chapter. As one member of the committee so well commented, the medical fraternity as a whole should be engaged at the present time in combating so-called socialized or state medicine. He states: "In all of these things, I think that the public relations sections of our societies should be on the alert for every opportunity to obtain favorable publicity. The idea of this publicity would be to create a receptive attitude in the public mind for ideas emanating from the profession. So far as we are concerned in the College, we could do our best work through direct contacts with the general practitioner and the public in reference to our own field and by stimulating the larger organizations, such as the American Medical Association, toward the activities which it is their duty to undertake." The public should be fully advised what the American College of Chest Physicians is doing, so that it will realize our object in our

specialty is to continually improve standards and thus better provide for our patients. The public will not oppose us when they know that we are working for something besides the satisfaction of our own selfish aims. We, as a group, know that we are exploring many fields, diagnostically and therapeutically, which will benefit our public more than it will us or our pocketbooks. It is our duty as individuals, and as a group, to let the lay public know what we are doing.

V. Public Relations in Regard to the Press.

Public relations in regard to the press is vital. We must be willing at all times to tell the newspapers of this country the truth. We must try to guide them into making correct statements regarding research "cures." We must see that publications which come into the hands of the press are properly edited as

to truth and language. In other words, we should be at all times cognizant of the power of the press, but we should never forget that as a group we are powerful enough to control that press with regard to the truth of its statements regarding our activities.

Your committee firmly believes that the above five sections if properly carried out would cover a sound program for College public relations. The committee also feels that in order to properly carry it out it might be necessary to have a department in our office called the Department of Public Relations. No individual or group of individuals has the time to successfully carry out this program except in a desultory sort of fashion. However, until the time arrives that the college has the funds to provide a full-time public relations department, your committee can function in the best manner possible consistent with the other duties of each member.

